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TAGS: [KWBG](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [KPAL](#) [IS](#)
SUBJECT: ABU MAZEN ASKS EXILED FATAH MEMBERS TO RETURN TO
WEST BANK

Classified By: Acting Principal Officer Thomas M. Duffy, per reasons 1.
4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Senior Fatah officials told ConGen political specialist that PA President Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) has recently encouraged senior exiled Fatah members to come to Ramallah in an effort to surround himself with strong Fatah personalities. Among this group are Fatah Central Council (FCC) members Mohammad Ghneim (Abu Maher) and Faruq al-Qadumi and PLO Central Council members Nayef Hawatmeh and Ahmad Afaneh, all of whom live between Tunis, Amman and Damascus. On August 18, a spokesman from the President's office announced that Abu Mazen recently met with Abu Maher and Afaneh in Amman and encouraged their return to the West Bank. On August 15, FCC member Nabil Sha'ath told the press that the GoI will permit Abu Maher, who has not visited the West Bank since 1967, to travel to Ramallah and allow the PA to issue him residency status. Senior Fatah officials told ConGen political specialist that Abu Maher has said he will only return, if Abu Mazen appoints him number two in the FCC.

¶2. (C) According to press reports, the GoI also approved al-Qadumi's return to the West Bank and will allow the PA to issue him residency status. Senior Fatah officials told ConGen political specialist that Al-Qadumi refused the offer and said he will not return to the West Bank while it is occupied. They also said that al-Qadumi, who was FCC Secretary General until recently, is at odds with Abu Mazen

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for removing him from that position. The GoI has not yet approved Hawatmeh's return to the West Bank.

¶3. (C) On August 15, Sha'ath denied press reports that the FCC had nominated Fatah-founder Abu Maher to succeed Abu Mazen as Fatah's next presidential candidate. Sha'ath told the press that the FCC did not discuss the issue. However, several FCC members, including Hakem Bilawi, told ConGen political specialist that Abu Mazen and several FCC members are seriously considering Abu Maher, although they have not officially endorsed him. One Fatah official said Abu Maher has "more friends than enemies within the FCC" and is the only viable option for a Fatah presidential candidate.

Bio Note

¶4. (C) Abu Maher was born in Jerusalem in 1937. He is one of the founders of Fatah and currently serves as a senior member of the FCC and the Fatah Revolutionary Council (FRC). He is based in Tunis and has not returned to the West Bank since 1967. In Egypt from 1957-1958, Abu Maher joined the Muslim Brotherhood. He left the Brotherhood in 1959 to help establish Fatah. In 1968, Abu Maher served as the Fatah Regional Commander in Jordan. He went to China for military

training in 1969 and served as Arafat's deputy for military administration from 1969-1970. Abu Maher joined the FRC in the late sixties and the Fatah Central Committee in 1974. During the eighties, he served as head of Fatah organizations and syndicates in Lebanon. Abu Maher rejected the Oslo Accords and refused to return to the West Bank and Gaza in 1994, setting up offices in Tunis and Amman instead. Although he opposed Oslo, he permitted his two sons to return to the West Bank where they worked for the PA since 1996 and now serve as Directors General at the Ministries of Labor and Public Works.

15. (C) Comment: Abu Maher is generally well-respected by senior FRC and FCC members, but has little grassroots or public support after his many years abroad. End Comment
DUFFY